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Relevance of the Application of Indian Classical Literary Theories

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India came in contact with the English literature in particular and other European literatures in general due to the colonial rule. Since 1835, due to the English education as per the plan of Macaulay, English literature has been being taught extensively in all the Universities of the country. Even after independence, there has been no change in it. In English literary studies, by and large, the students are taught the interpretation and evaluation of the literary texts by applying one or the other western theories and perspectives. The matter has not ended here. Even the students of the regional Indian literatures are also taught the western theories and their application on Indian literary texts. Of course, teaching western theories and their application on our texts is certainly a welcome step. Indian students must learn evaluating Indian literatures from external (western etc.) perspectives also. However, when our students are taught evaluating our literatures in the western fashion, then unknowingly or knowingly, we are also, teaching them to fashion ourselves in western ways and shaping or forming our culture, values and ethos etc. also from the western viewpoints.

In this context, this fact cannot be ignored that the Indian literary and critical traditions are older than, or at least, as old as western literary and critical traditions. However, since these traditions are not made the part of our University curricula extensively and the other non-Indian traditions are made extensive use of in curricula, our students have been losing track of Indian ethos, values, approaches and perspectives and their intellectual and cultural development remains lopsided. If Indian students of literature do not know anything about Indian poetic traditions, it is both unfair and undesirable. Depriving our students of the millennial old Indian intellectual and cultural traditions is a grave blunder on our part.

Many scholars of the country who maintained their hegemony on curricula development did not let it be the part of curricula, because they thought that Indian poetic theories were irrelevant and hence of no use. This hypothesis of them is based either on their ignorance or colonial prejudice against these literary and critical traditions. Many scholars do think even today that Indian poetics cannot be applied on contemporary texts for the reasons of criticism. They feel that Indian poetics is outdated and other literary theories are much ahead in time and have already marched far ahead in the world. Since the other ones are more reliable, only they should be taught. Under such circumstances, it is the need of the day to investigate into this phenomenon and arrive at a rational diagnosis of it. Moreover, there is a need to alter this view by example i.e. by creating models of the analysis of Indian theories not only on Indian texts but also on canonical English texts to prove that Indian poetics is relevant even today and it has universal significance too.



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Fortunately, some universities in India and abroad have started offering courses on Indian poetics and ancient /Classical Indian literatures. The NEP 2020 also aims at encouraging and promoting this on a mass scale. So, now we hope for its decisive implementation and expect encouraging outcome of the same in national interest in near future. A few universities also offer how to evaluate the literary works from these perspectives. At present, fortunately, we do have scholars in the country, who are familiar with Indian literatures as well as the poetic traditions. At the same time, this is also a fact that a very few of them have tried to systematically analyze literary texts from Indian poetic and critical traditions in a manner that can win the confidence of the contemporary readers. Hence, there is a need to revive these traditions in a convincing manner by presenting them with specimen models of their application on texts.

It is the need of the day that we convince the academia in the field of humanities that not only Indian poetic theories are relevant today in applying them on contemporary Indian literatures, but also that they can be applied on western texts. Further, when they are applied on them, it is interesting to know the result of the application. We arrive at new interpretations of them and develop new understanding of life and reality around us. We had similar experiences when the western parameters were applied on Indian texts in the initial periods of colonization.

Those, who have applied Indian aesthetic theories, have applied particularly the *rasa* and *dhwani* theories. For instance, Ms. Sangeeta Mohanti has done her Ph D research on *Hamlet* from the Indian perspective from a foreign university. Such efforts are good and path-showing. Still, such efforts are very few and in their initial stage only in terms of both the quality and quantity. We do trace some such efforts in last 170 years, because since 1860, Indian critics like Michael Madhusudana Dutt, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sri Aurobindo, Robindranath Tagore etc. have given their Indian responses to western literature. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee has given his views on *The Tempest*, *Othello* and other plays and they are expressed in 1872 in *Bankim Rachanabali Vol. II*. A systematic and elaborate study of Shakespeare is seen in *Hamlet Unveiled* (1906) by Rentala Venkata Subbarau.

The question is how can it be done. In this regard, as M. S. Kushwaha mentions, the scholars must make certain modifications in their application, because they cannot be applied as they are, because Indian theories did not come into existence for helping readers in interpretation. They rather guide the poets/writers in their compositions. Kapil Kapoor also believes that some composite models need to be developed for their more effective and meaningful applications. He writes in *Literary Theory* that



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a need is felt for a composite analytical framework – quite contrary to the insistence in the tradition on a strict adherence to one theory alone. A practical analytical model should be strong enough to investigate all the major dimensions of a literary composition . . . Such a model shall lean on more than one theory and draw its categories eclectically from as many theories as need be. (34)

He even states that such a composite model is available in tradition itself and shows the model of analysis presented by Rajasekhara (10th century). All the Indian theories have emerged from their preceding theories and thus have close connection among them. Hence, one need not confine oneself to any single theory alone and need not mind taking ideas from other theories also while applying a specific theory.

On the other hand, most of the contemporary Western theories are ideology-centric and therefore, two theories are difficult to combine and apply, unless they are having similar premises. As a result, there is a trend that one can apply only one theory at a time on a work. The ancient western theories like that of Aristotle and Longinus are ideologically neutral and content-centric and hence, a critic could and can use both of them together in interpreting or evaluating a text.

The Indian as well as the western classical theories promote evaluation of literature in terms of its capacity to provide vision and wisdom for a good quality life. The modern literary theories, rather than revealing the wisdom for life to elevate its quality, remain confined to merely comprehension of the reality.

There are four Indian theories which can be applied exclusively on texts to have a complete analysis of them. They are Bharatmuni's *Rasa* theory, Bhamaha's *Alamkara* theory, Anandvardhana's *Dhvani* theory and Kuntak's *Vakrokti* theory. The other theories can be employed along with these theories to explore some other significant aspects of the text. For example, Vamana's *Riti* theory (which discusses the language and style of the text), Kshemendra's *Aucitya* theory (which evaluates the propriety and decorum of the 27 types in the text) and Pt. Jagannath's *Ramaniyata* theory (the beauty of the text), can be added to explore some specific aspects of the text. In addition, the merits and demerits (*guna* and *dosha*) of the text as discussed by Dandi in his concept of the 'ideal literature' (*kavyadarsh*) can also be taken up for critiquing. It is up to the researcher to bring about creative and meaningful employment of these theories.

The textual and stylistic discussions of the text can be further mingled with the exploring of the construction of the Indian understanding of life and individuals in the texts. Indian poetics does have the discussion of the kinds of heroes in literature. The analysis of these aspects will bring into discussion what India appreciates



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or admires and what does it not. Indian attitude to nature, environment and ecology is also possible and worth discussing. I am sure that it gives an altogether unique and acceptable assessment of our attitudes to them. In short, we need to explore the Indian philosophy which is mingled in the construction of the texts. In doing that we shall be actually exploring the true Indianness in our literatures.

Even while applying these theories and philosophies on the Western texts, we would be critically evaluating their problems and crises from our viewpoint. We have sufficient scope to diagnostically examine the social, psychological, domestic and individual/personal issues of humanity too from our angle. India offers guidance for all types of human issues and our critical writings must reveal them by applying our theories and philosophies (wisdom) on these texts. In examining the actions and their objectives on the part of the characters, the Indian perspective i.e. which Indian values and ethos get manifested in them, can be revealed to bring out Indianness. It would enrich our students' understanding of our cultural values and make them more at home in assessing their own problems well. All these things would emerge as the result of the application of Indian poetic, literary and intellectual traditions on literatures. For example, why does the revolution fail in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* has its own Marxist, Freudian, Lacanian and Sartrean explanations in addition to many other socio-psychological explanations. In the same way, there can be Indian explanation also which is based on ages-old Indian study of human life in the world.

Let us now apply the Indian literary theory of *Dhvani* on George Orwell's classic novella *Animal Farm* (1945) and critically examine how it works and also see whether its result is relevant or not. Anandvardhana classifies *Dhvani* into three categories and the third category called *rasadhvani* is of the highest type and it makes the text a great work of art. Orwell's *Animal Farm* has *rasadhwni* in it. The suggested meaning of the text is superior to the verbal meaning of the text. Also, the *Dhvani* emerges out of the *rasanubhava* of the text rather than the obvious content or the literary structure of it. It echoes in the mind of the reader those meanings which may have as such no connection with the verbal text. In addition, the suggested meaning is not predictable, because it depends on the readers and the meanings evoked in them. Of course, the meaning that emerges stands justified through textual evidences. The reader is able to see new meanings having strong connection with the text as far as implications are concerned. The background and the life experiences of the readers play a powerful role in capturing the *dhvani* of the text. A text which can generate more and more *dhvani* is the merit of the text. The text which is capable of echoing different patterns of life and their meanings, is a great work of art according to this school.



The 9th century Indian poetician Anandvardhana's *Dhvani* theory basically pertains to the levels of meaning. There are fundamentally two types of meaning – *Vacyarth* (textual or *Abhidha* in Anandvardhana's view) and *Pratiyaman* (suggestive) which further can be classified into *Laxana*, *Tatparya* and *Vyanjana*. It holds that *Vyanjana* i.e. suggestion is a defining quality of a great work of art and hence a special function of language or the *Dhvani* of the text. The theory enquires into the conditions in which a word or a sentence would give rise to a meaning which is other than the *Vacyarth* or the *Abhidharth* of the literary text in question. According to Anandavardhana, this special verbal function is exclusively the domain of poetry/literature. Only that differentiates it from all other types of the non-literary discourse. The figurative expression in poetry is of this nature and hence, it involves an implicit incongruity.

Abhinavagupta, the main commentator and explorer of this theory states about suggestion that

A further (unsaid) meaning, relationship to the secondary meaning, and inadequacy of the conventional meaning - these are the regulative principles of the suggestive function ("Locana" *Dhvanyaloka*, 111.33) (394)

Thus, Chari states that "a simple punning expression (paronomasia) is not to be admitted to the rank of suggestion. It is only when that expression points to another figure as metaphor or paradox, through the power of the context, that we have suggestion." (395)

Chari further adds that all of the senses of the word are still expressly stated by the word itself, and, hence, they belong to its denotative function. Anandavardhana states, "It is only when the context points, without explicit mention, to a relation, such as that of similitude or opposition, between the two meanings that we have the proper suggestive function." (*Dhvanyaloka*, II, gloss on 21). (395)

In Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Old Major blames man for the deplorable fate of his fellow animals. He assures them in his address that they can have a better life only when they would remove him:

The soil of England is fertile, its climate is gold, it is capable of affording food in abundance to an enormously greater number of animals than now inhabit it. This single farm of ours would support a dozen horses, twenty cows, hundreds of sheep – and all of them living in a comfort and a dignity that are now almost beyond our imagining. (5) (217)



He invokes them for a rebellion, bringing solidarity amongst themselves forgetting the difference of their species. He distinguishes between men and animals in binary terms and gives them some alarms for avoiding any issue:

Whatever goes upon two legs, is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. (7)

The Seven Commandments (their constitution or manual for practice) is prepared by the pigs who take up the leadership, as the Old Major was a pig and the pigs were perceived as cleverest among all. Everything is alright for some time, but then corruption in conduct enters. The leading group i.e. the pigs 'did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others' (14–15). They start misinforming and misguiding the others in the Farm. They become self-centric and power-hungry. So, they start drifting away from their ideas and in the end, the farm is significantly worse off for its non-pig inhabitants. Now all are not equal, as some are more equal. Critics have found the novella to be an allegory on the Bolshevik revolution and its result.

One of the suggestive meanings (*dhvani*) of the novella is the moral and ethical fall of an individual. Why and when does an individual fail and fall? We believe that there are six main enemies (*shadaripu*) of humans are *kama*, *krodh*, *lobh*, *moha*, *mada* and *matsar*. Whenever an individual is governed by any of these six attitudes, he won't be able to perceive the reality and assess it objectively. As the result, he will make blunders in his actions and therefore will fail or fall. One cannot attain noble goals practicing any of the six weaknesses. The Old Major had noble intentions, but Napoleon subverted them by following the six human weaknesses. As a result, the poor and hard-working common people could not change their fate, but continued to suffer even more. Napoleon is governed by most of the six human weaknesses. They are the reasons of his fall and diversion from the goal. The text suggests this meaning to an Indian reader.

The novella also has a suggestive meaning on why promising circumstances also fail to yield the expected result. India doesn't believe in the theory of 'ends justify the means'. In other words, the evil means cannot lead one to noble attainments. If our goals are noble, then our means to attain them also have got to be noble. If the means are corrupt and unethical, one can never attain the noble goals. The Machiavellian, Capitalist or Marxist ideologies do not follow this principle or vision of life and hence they can never lead humanity further on the path of glory and prosperity. We believe in hating the sin rather than the sinner. But in the novel, even the Old Major also identifies the enemy in material terms. i.e. one who walks on two legs. For



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him a man is one who walks on two legs and hence he is the enemy. He is not able to visualize that his own followers, the pigs can also walk on two legs in future. So it is not walking but one's attitudes that makes him good or bad. Not persons but ideas, attitudes and perspectives are friends or enemies. Generalizing the enemy in the form of caste, class, creed, language, gender etc. can never lead any to prosperity and success.

It is also the *dhvani* of the text that the animals had no vision for reconstructing their society, and if at all there was any vision, it was quite crude, faulty, incomplete and impracticable. They had identified their enemy and they thought that eradicating him would lead them to a better future. Further, they think that satisfying the basic needs like food, shelter and security from the enemy is sufficient. In such cases, once the goal of eradicating the enemy is attained, really speaking the masses have no task and because they have not attained peace and prosperity, they have frustration. The animals don't have anything more which can keep the masses together and struggle with confidence for attaining the goals. In Indian sense, the leaders of the animals speak of only *arth* and *kama*. There is no thinking on *dharma* and *moksha*. We believe that people have four driving forces to live i.e. *dharma*, *Artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. In the light of this, the vision of the animals is incomplete and hence very likely to fail. The history has been a witness to this phenomenon.

It is not true that the ideal societies cannot come into existence. India has given models of ideal societies. They are recorded by the foreign travelers during the ancient and medieval times. Ram Rajya, Hastinapur under Yudhishtir, the Gupta period, the Maurya period, the Chola Period, the Pandiyan periods etc. had been full of peace and prosperity. Because this vision is not there, the novella is not able to invite that kind of echo in the readers.

It is also the *dhvani* of the text on why does the leaders fail. In the absence of the visionary leaders, if the emerging new leaders are not committed to ideology, they take undue advantage of the circumstances and ascend to occupy the higher seat, take control of the followers. Later, they do drift away from the ideals and mission statements of their ideology for their own vested interests. Since they are concerned with enjoying the power and the comforts given by it, rather than attaining the noble goals, they become busy in safeguarding their seats of power from those who they see as their possible rivals. They employ their energy in spoiling the images of their rivals and also in arousing fear in the minds of the masses. They try to keep their flock together under themselves only. The result, therefore, is failure on their part.



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One finds the *dhvani* of how grand dreams of visionaries have been being betrayed for centuries. The text exposes the universal patterns of the phenomenon of betrayal and the ways of betraying. Commandments (constitutions) are tempered with. The real principles are sacrificed. Facts are hidden from the common men and through media (blackboard) they are misinformed and misguided. Dedicated simple people are utilized by these selfish leaders taking advantage of their simplicity and commitment. Thus, friends are treated as enemies and those who have been identified as enemies are invited as friends. Even their interests are safeguarded in lieu of some benefits. Not just this, but the state starts adopting the ways of their identified enemies also e.g. walking on two legs, wearing clothes, eating with forks and spoons etc. One can see this in communist countries where the state rather than withering away starts running the capitalist units themselves. The state itself becomes the capitalist force.

In the similar way, even the major characters can also be evaluated from *dhvani* perspective and provide the light of Indian perspectives. The style can also be critically explored using *dhvani* terminology. The true leaders or the visionaries are honest and really well meaning. They are truly concerned with the humanity at large, but their foolish, over-enthusiasts or self-centred followers disrupt the dream and goals.

Thus, the Indian classical poetic theories are relevant today.



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